
PART I – SAREY’S STORY

Chapter 1

First Encounter

Sarey Jane Munroe’s heart raced as she stared at Billy Puckett leaning against a shelf in Taylor’s General Store. It was the first time she had seen him since he was in sixth grade and she was in fourth.

My, he growed up right handsome. A mite taller than he were five years ago, but two things is still the same. That shank of blond hair hanging down his forehead and his eyes is still blue as a summer sky.

She frowned, remembering how Billy used to tease her, calling her “Freckle Face” and pulling her pigtails. One day she tackled him to the ground

and punched him until he yelled “Uncle.” For her teacher, Miz Mabel, it was the last straw.

“I’ve had enough of your foolishness, Miss Sarey Jane. It’s a waste of time fer you *and* fer me fer you to stay in school. You cain’t learn. You’re always lookin’ out the winder daydreaming and I cain’t take no more of your stupid questions. Don’t bother comin’ back to school tomorra or ever again.”

Sarey stood up straight with shoulders back, dusted herself off and gathered her belongings, as she heard the other children’s giggles.

Good riddance to you, too, Miz Mabel. I ain’t gonna miss school one bit. It’ll be fun helpin’ Papa on the farm more and learnin’ how to cook good as Mama. .

Later that day, as she waited for her Pa to come and pick her up, she said goodbye to her best friends, Emmy Lou Jorgensen and Jamie O'Reilly.

“You’re ’bout the only ones I’m gonna miss. You’re the only ones is nice to me.”

“That’s ’cause you always been nice to us. When my folks and me moved to Mary’s Cove from Minnesota, you was the only one who didn’t tease me ’cause we wasn’t born here like everyone else and my mama and daddy couldn’t talk English good,” said Emmy Lou.

“And ye didn’t make fun of me brogue,” added Jamie.

“That’s ’cause of the soda bread pudding and scones you always brung us,” Sarey teased.

“Well, when ye come to town, ye must stop by. Me ma will have some extra waitin’ for ye.”

“Billy only picks on you ’cause he likes you,” Emmy Lou remarked.

“Sure has a funny way of showin’ it. I thought it was on account of the bad blood ’twixt our families.”

“Sarey Jane, Sarey Jane, are you deaf? I been callin’ you!”

Her mother’s voice jolted her back to reality.

“Sorry, Mama. I was jest thinkin’ about somethin’.”

“Humph! The only thing you should be thinkin’ about is helpin’ me with the shoppin’. Whatch you starin’ at? It’s one of them no-good Puckett boys, ain’t it?”

“I reckon, Mama.”

“I’m warnin’ ya. Stay away from him. Ya know what his great-granddaddy did to yer great- granddaddy. Let’s get to our bidness and get outta here.”

Her mother yanked Sarey’s arm so hard it made her wince. She glanced over her shoulder to see the blond boy smiling at her. Sarey blushed but didn’t dare smile back. His warm expression almost made the pain in her arm go away.

“You ain’t never to talk to that boy or none of them Pucketts!” her mother hissed.

Sarey ducked to avoid the angry woman’s slap, but it landed squarely on her cheek. Her mama had never hit her in anger before.

“O...Okay, Mama,” Sarey whimpered as she rubbed her cheek.

Embarrassed, Mr. Taylor looked away for a moment and fiddled with some papers on the counter.

“Your things are all boxed up, Annabelle. See you next week. You, too Miss Sarey Jane,” Mr. Taylor said, smiling at her.

After they got home, Sarey jumped down and started to pick up the box of groceries from the back of the wagon.

“Leave ‘em be. Your pa’ll get ‘em. Remember what happened last time you tried to bring the groceries in by yerself? You done dropped the box and broke a jar of pickles. That were ten cent wasted. You is clumsy as an ox.”

Sarey hung her head. “Yes, Mama. I remember. My butt was sore for a week. I *am* clumsy as an ox.

“You can take Lightnin’ into the barn, unhitch the buckboard and feed and brush him down, so’s your pa don’t have to.”

Sarey’s face brightened. “Sure will, Mama!”

“Then you can go pick some carrots for dinner.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Sarey led the gelding into the barn, unhitched him, gave him some water and started to brush him vigorously.

“You’re a good boy, Lightnin’. You deserve a treat. I’ll fetch you some carrots.”

Sarey went to the garden, picked a half dozen carrots and put them in her apron. Then she spotted a scrawny, shriveled-up carrot and put it in the pocket of her dress.

This one will be perfect for Lightning.

She walked into the kitchen and handed her mother the carrots, then ran back out the door. She saw her father running towards the house.

“What did I tell you ’bout not puttin’ stuff away? You left the curry comb on the floor in Lightning’s stall. He could of stepped on it and broke it or buried it in the hay.”

Tom's hand flew toward Sarey's head and landed on her left temple.

"I'm sorry, Daddy. It won't happen again. I fergot. I was in a hurry to pick the carrots for Mama before she got mad."

"I swear. You got more excuses than Carter gots little liver pills. Go on in the house!"

"Yes, Papa."

After dinner and the dishes were done, Sarey got ready for her bath. Mama always insisted that she take a bath every Saturday night. Sarey didn't see that she needed one that often, but any time she protested her mother would swat her.

"You is gonna act like a young lady and smell like one too, even if you put up a fuss ever time I make you put a dress on. Ain't no child of mine gonna go around lookin' and smellin' like a darky."

Sarey hated the baths because of the harsh soap her mother made and the shampoo that always managed to get in her eyes and sting them. She had seen some fancy soap that smelled like flowers in Mr. Taylor's store and asked her mother about it.

"We cain't afford that, Sarey Jane. Besides, only reason a woman would use that is so's a man would notice her and you don't need to be gettin' any of them idears in your head."

Sarey took her bath and, after drying off and donning her nightgown, went into the parlor.

"Can I go sit on the front porch, Mama, so's the breeze can dry my hair?"

"Suit yerself."

As Sarey sat in the rocker, she looked up at the sky, saw an endless sea of stars and started counting them.

"One, two, three...fifteen, seventeen...no wait...sixteen comes next. Eighteen, nineteen."

Sarey stopped. She always got mixed up when she got to nineteen. When she had been in school, she could count way past 100 and could add and subtract. She had forgotten most of that.

“Woo, Woo, Woo,” she howled, gazing at the full moon and imitating a coyote.

Rover, the family’s mongrel dog, started barking and howling along with her.

“What in tarnation’s goin’ on out here?” Tom yelled as he opened the door.

Sarey stopped abruptly and looked at her father.

“Woo, Woo, Woo,” Tom started to howl.

Sarey giggled. “Pa, you sound jest like a coyote.”

“Enough of that tomfoolery. You know better’n to encourage her.” Annabelle yelled from the parlor. “Sarey Jane, time to come in. We got church in the mornin’.”

Tom and Sarey grinned at each other and went inside.

Chapter 2

The Lord's Day

Sunday morning the air was getting clammy—the first sign of a rainstorm.

“We shouldn’t be goin’ to church this mornin’,” Tom remarked.

“And pray tell, why not?” replied Annabelle.

“‘Cause it might rain and the road’ll get muddy real quick.”

“Jest ‘cause it *might* rain ain’t good enough reason for not keepin’ the Lord’s Day holy.”

“Okay. You sure are good at gettin’ your way when you set a mind to it. I should know better’n to argue with you.

The Munroes arrived at Holy Spirit Primitive Baptist Church at their usual time—ten o’clock. Pastor and Mrs. Clark were greeting everyone as they entered the tiny white-washed building. Their son, seventeen-year-old Henry, stood next to them. He was tall and skinny and his pants that reached only to his ankles made him look even taller.

“Mornin’, Annabelle, Tom, Miss Sarey Jane. Hope you’re doin’ well this fine day,” the preacher said.

“Right as rain, Pastor Clark,” Annabelle replied.

“Looks like rain, too” added Tom.

Sarey glanced at Henry who was staring at her breasts out of the corner of his eye and

smiling. She turned and hurried into the church. Henry made Sarey’s skin crawl, like ants were walking all over

her. Ever since they were in school, she had disliked his whininess and how he would tattle to Miz Mabel about every little thing the other children did wrong.

After the collection basket was passed around, Pastor Clark addressed the congregation.

“Today, I will be speaking on the First Commandment—I am the Lord, thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

The pastor cleared his throat and took out a sheaf of papers.

“This is gonna be a long one,” Tom whispered to Sarey. .

Annabelle glanced sideways and poked her husband in the ribs.

“Now ya’ll probably know what this here commandment means. You cain’t worship no idols like them Catholics or pray to false gods like the heathens do—them A-rabs and Chinks.

“This is one way that we true believers are like them Jews. They do worship the one true God. Too bad,

they don't believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and won't be goin' to heaven, but we can pray for their conversion.

“Now what many of ya'll might not know is that a god don't have to be a spiritual

being or a graven image. You can make a god of money, possessions, lust, and even havin' too

much fun. When we crave money or any of those things, we are worshipping false gods.

Everything we have comes from God and belongs to God. He has commanded us to be good

stewards and generous givers. Now, I know a lot of y'all aren't givin' your full ten percent tithe.

When you hold onto anything tightly your hands are closed. That means God cannot give you

any more. But when you give, God will reward you with abundance. So, I'm telling you right

now that come next week, I'm expecting all of y'all to be generous givers.”

Pastor Clark went on to explain the evils of carnal lust—drinking, gambling, dancing and playing cards and showed that these were all false gods. His description of

eternal damnation and the fires of hell made Sarey's skin prickle with goosebumps.

After what seemed like a *true* eternity to Sarey, the pastor concluded, "So, I hope that everyone will take heed, repent of your sins and I want this here collection basket to be full next Sunday. And remember, if you don't have the money, you can give the bounty of your harvest and the toil of your hands. We welcome your fresh eggs, collards and anything else. And if anyone here knows anything about plumbin', we need someone who can put in our new toilet.

Mrs. Clark done bought one out of the Sears and Roebuck catalog. No more goin' to

the privy. Halleluia! We'll conclude our service with Hymn 79, 'Shall We Gather at the River.'"

Before everyone filed out, Mrs. Clark announced, "We'll be eatin' inside 'stead of on the grounds 'cause it's fixin' to rain."

"We need to go," said Tom, looking up at the dark clouds.

“I ’spect you’re right,” replied Annabelle.

Sarey breathed a sigh of relief. *Sure glad we’re leavin’ early. I won’t have to tolerate*

Henry sittin’ next to me with his stanky breath.

“I’ll be makin’ collards, beans and ham for dinner. What time you wanna eat? ”

Annabelle asked Tom, as they were riding back home.

“Same time we eat ever day. I reckon one o’clock will be jest fine. Give me time to do a few chores if’n the rain don’t hit first.”

After dinner, Annabelle sat down with her mending while Tom picked up the newspaper

and Sarey worked on her needlepoint.

“I tole you it was gonna rain,” Tom remarked, as a loud thunderclap broke the silence. “I’m goin’ upstairs and take a nap. Come upstairs and take a nap too, Annie,” he said, winking at her. .

“I got a heapa mendin’ to do.”

“C’mon. It can wait.”

Annabelle got up. “You’ll be okay down here by yourself, Sarey Jane?”

“Course, Mama. I gotta finish this sampler in time for Granny Baker’s birthday.”

Sarey picked up the cloth and began embroidering.

“Damn!” she cried out when she pricked herself with the needle.

The girl looked around to see if anyone had heard, half-expecting her mother or father to

come racing down the stairs to slap her and wash her mouth out with soap. Sarey grabbed the

thimble sitting next to the sewing case and placed it on her finger.

“Fiddlesticks, fiddlesticks. I got to remember to say ‘fiddle sticks’ ’stead of that other

word.”

She soon tired of the embroidery and set about straightening up the parlor and picking up her clothes that were laying on her bedroom floor. Then she went into the kitchen and made sandwiches for supper. It was five o’clock when Tom and Annabelle came back downstairs.

“Well, I declare, Sarey Jane, you done fixed supper and tidied up the parlor,” Annabelle

remarked, smiling at her daughter.

“You’re gettin’ to be a right little housewife,” said Tom. “Purt soon the young fellers’ll

come courtin.’ Henry Clark sure seems kinda sweet on you.”

“Oh, Papa, don’t be silly. I ain’t gonna be ready to get hitched for a long time, ’specially

to Henry Clark.”

“Why not? A preacher’s son. And he can read and all. Why wouldn’t you wanna get

hitched to him?” asked her father.

“‘Cause he smells like a polecat.”

“That’s a real mean thing to say, Sarey Jane. Maybe you gots your eye on someone else

who maybe gots his eye on you,” Annabelle hissed.

“Mama!” Sarey pleaded.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tom asked

“Nuthin’. I’m jest rattlin’ on. Don’t pay no mind to me.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders and sat down at the table to eat.

Chapter 3

The Dream

Sarey Jane tossed and turned in her sleep that night. She woke up and looked around. The room seemed unfamiliar. She could have sworn there was someone at the foot of her bed—a shadowy figure, holding what looked like a noose in its hand. Sarey stifled a scream, knowing that if she cried out her mother would come running and, like so many times before, would chide her for “waking the whole house with your foolishness.” She pulled the cover over her head and when she peeked out, the figure was gone.

She lay there a few minutes, saying over and over, “You ain’t there. You ain’t real!” until her heart slowed to a steady beat. Then she gradually fell back to sleep.

Sarey was in the cellar. She was crying out to her mother, "Mama, please don't lock me in here. I promise it won't happen again."

Then a soft, wet bundle hit her in the head. Her mother had thrown Sarey Jane's soiled bedclothes down the stairs.

"You is gonna stay in there 'til you learn not to wet your bed. You're eight years old. You ain't a baby no more," Annabelle had yelled.

Sarey crawled into the corner and wept softly and began to hit her head with her fist.

"Why am I so stupid? Why am I so bad? Why cain't I be a good girl, the kind that Mama and Daddy will love."

She woke up. It was still dark outside. The house was quiet. Sarey tiptoed into the kitchen, pumped the handle of the water pump a few times and poured herself a glass of water.

She lit the logs in the firebox, exactly the way she had watched her mother do it, and took the coffee can down from the shelf. She pumped water into the coffee pot and carefully scooping out two tablespoons of coffee into the basket, Sarey placed it in the pot and put the lid on. After setting the coffee pot on the stove, she went back into her room to get dressed.

When she heard footsteps on the stairs, Sarey skipped into the hallway and greeted her mother.

“I got the coffee ready, Mama. I did it just like you do.”

Annabelle walked into the kitchen and saw the brown liquid oozing down the sides of the pot.

“What have you done, girl! The coffee done overflowed. I swear you is useless!” her mother shouted.

Sarey ran back into her room and lay on her bed sobbing. She put her thumb in her mouth, but instead of sucking it, she started to bite her nail.

“I’m stupid. I’m stupid,” she said, sobbing.

When she felt it was safe to come out of her room, she walked into the kitchen.

“I’m sorry, Mama. I was just tryin’ to help.”

“I’m sorry, Mama. I was just tryin’ to help,”

Annabelle parroted. “I don’t need that kinda help. I swear you is more grief than I can take. You coulda burnt the house down, messin’ with the stove that- a-way.”

“I know, Mama. I won’t do it no more”

“You’d better not or you’ll find yourself locked in the cellar again,” Annabelle replied. “Now go fetch the eggs.”

This was Sarey’s chore. She loved to feel the warm eggs in her hand and place each one carefully in her basket. At least this was one thing she was good at.

After gathering up the eggs and putting them in the icebox, Sarey went back into her room and made her bed.

Soon, the aroma of bacon cooking wafted through the house.

“Come in and set the table, Sarey Jane, and be quick about it,” she heard her mother call.

Tom was sitting at the table drinking a cup of coffee and counting the money in the tin box that was kept on the highest shelf in the kitchen.

“We need two more dollars before we can get the harness fixed,” Tom said.

“We got two dozen eggs set aside we can sell,” replied Annabelle. “And I’ll see if Mr. Taylor will buy some of my jars of dill pickles.”

Every week was the same at the Munroe household. Monday was washing day; Tuesdays– ironing. Wednesdays, Annabelle would scrub all the floors. Thursday she would do her baking for the rest of the week and Friday she and Sarey Jane would dust and straighten the house for the weekend.

Saturday was shopping day. That was when Sarey got to go into town. Sometimes she would see her friends from school. Sometimes, if her mother was in a good mood and there was money left over, Sarey got to buy a few pieces of peppermint candy.

As Mr. Taylor was packing up the last of the groceries, Sarey said to Annabelle, “Mama, I gotta go to the privy.”

“Jest wait.”

“I cain’t, Mama. I gotta go real bad.” She squirmed from one foot to the other.

“Well, come back directly when you’re done.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sarey walked out the back door and approached the privy. She glanced down when she saw Billy leaving the outhouse buttoning his trousers.

“I’m real sorry I got you in trouble last week. I’ll make it up to you. You wanna peppermint stick.”

“I’d better not.”

“Why?”

“You know why. You’re a Puckett and I’m a Munroe. If Mama catches me, she’ll wanna know where I got it and I ain’t no good at makin’ up stories.”

“All right, but it don’t make no sense our families hating each other for somethin’ that happened way back. Those things don’t have nuthin’ to do with you and me.”

“I know, but that’s jest the way things is. Besides, you was mean to me when I was in school.”

“I was jest havin’ fun. Did that to all the girls to get their attention.”

“Well, it weren’t very nice.”

“I’d best get back in the store and let you go about your bidness. Your mama shouldn’ta hit you like that.”

“I deserved it, I reckon.”

“Nope. Hittin’ girls ain’t right.”

“I’d better hurry up. Lord knows what Mama’ll do to me if she ketches me talkin’ to you. Probably tell Daddy. Then I’ll be in a licka trouble.”

“I’m workin’ for Mr. Taylor now, so I’ll be seein’ you around here again.”

“Maybe.”

Sarey entered the dark smelly building, held her nose and urinated. She ran back inside and saw her mother tapping her foot.

“What took ya?”

“I had the runs, Mama,” she said, raising her voice.

“You watch your tone with me, little lady. I don’t know what’s gotten into you. First, you go eyein’ that Puckett boy and then you sass me. I got a mind to tell your daddy.

“Please, Mama, don’t tell,”

“We’ll just see, Missy.”

Chapter 4

Awakenings

“Sarey Jane, wake up. Them chickens ain’t gonna feed theyselves,” her mother called from the kitchen.

Sarey stretched and yawned. She hadn’t slept well. Another nightmare had awakened her. This one was different from any of the others.

She was locked in the basement, yelling for her parents. She lay there for what seemed like hours unable to move a muscle while worms crawled over her and rats nipped at her fingers.

Sarey looked down at her chest and saw spots of blood on her nightgown. Her hands were bloody too.

“Lord! I done scratched myself!”

Sarey used to grow her fingernails long, at least as long as she dare—all except for the one that she bit when she was frightened or sad. She had seen the moving picture actresses in the magazines at Mr. Taylor’s store. Their nails were long and painted red.

Once, she had found a can of red paint in the barn and started painting her fingernails bright red until her mother caught her and whipped her. Now she had just one long fingernail on her right hand and managed to keep it hidden from her mama.

Sarey slipped out of her nightgown, went to the ewer and basin and poured some water over the bloodstains, scrubbed until the stains were gone and then the nightgown over the chair to dry.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps approaching her room.

“Sarey Jane, I’m on my way in there with my hairbrush. You best get out here right now.”

Sarey flinched. “Comin,’ Mama.”

As quickly as she had undressed, she grabbed the nearest shirt and overalls, threw them on, ran into the kitchen, grabbed a biscuit, raced out the door, and ran to the chicken coop.

“Good mornin’, Precious. Good mornin’, Buttercup,” she said, greeting each one by name.

She had named all twelve of her chickens. Precious got her name because she was sickly when newly hatched and Sarey had nursed her back to health. Buttercup was named for her golden yellow color.

The rest of the week went by—one day leading to the next. Sarey always anticipated Wednesdays when her father let her come and help him in the fields.

Her mother usually objected, saying she needed Sarey to help her in the house. This was one of the few times her father got his way.

“Annabelle, one day this place will be hers, if’n the bank don’t get it first. She needs to know how to do the farmin’ as much as the cookin’ and cleanin’.”

Sarey skipped as she tried to keep up with her father’s long strides. They spent almost three hours in the fields. He let her ride Pokey, the mule, while he walked

behind, tilling the soil. Every once in a while she would dig her heels gently into Pokey's sides and say, "Giddyap. You is slow as molasses!"

Tom and Sarey would laugh until tears ran down their cheeks. She wished things could stay like this forever.

Around noon, they would head back to the house, covered in dirt and sweat. They'd wash up at the pump and then go inside to dinner.

Friday evening Sarey went to bed early. She washed carefully behind her ears, scrubbed her nails, and made sure no dirt was caked around her ankles.

The next morning Sarey jumped out of bed before her mother had to call her even once. After dressing in her newest pair of overalls, she skipped into the kitchen. Her mother sat at the table still dressed in her nightgown.

"You're gonna have to pick up the supplies," Annabelle said to Tom. "I'm feelin' poorly. Take Sarey with you."

“Papa, you gonna take a walk today whilst I do the shoppin’?” Sarey asked as they approached town.

She knew that when Tom went into town, he almost always “took a walk,” meaning he was going to Ardy’s house for a few swigs of home brew.

“Most likely. Why’s it a concern of yourn?”

“No perticular reason, Papa.”

After arriving at the store, Tom told Sarey, “I’ll be back directly. I’m gonna take a walk. My legs is cramped from sittin’ so long.”

“Okay, Papa.”

She felt so grown up doing the shopping by herself.

Maybe I’ll see Billy again, she thought.

“Hey, Mr. Taylor. Mama’s feelin’ poorly so I’m gonna pick up our supplies.”

“Well, give her my regards.”

“Mama said to get five pound of flour, two pound of dried beans, a can of coffee, and two jars of dill pickles.”

“You got all that remembered in your head? You’re a smart girl.”

Sarey blushed. Mr. Taylor had a way of making her feel special.

“I’ll get your stuff. It’ll be jest a few minutes. Go take a look around? I got some new things in this week.”

Sarey wandered around the store looking at all the goods displayed on the shelves. She picked up a porcelain figurine of an angel, gazed at it and ran her callused fingers around the edges. Sarey wished they were rich so she could buy anything she wanted.

When she rounded the corner near the back of the store, Sarey spotted Billy putting some cans of soup on the shelf.

“Hey, Sarey,” he said, a broad smile on his face.

“Hey, Billy.”

“Nice to see you again.”

“Likewise. You must feel real grewed up, workin’
in a store and all”

“Yep. I make fifteen cent a day.”

“Is that a lot of money?”

“It sure is! I’m supposed to give it all to my pa, but
I keep some fer myself. I gots fifty cent saved already. As
soon as I save up twenty dollars, I’m leavin’ this place.”

“Leavin’? Where you goin’?”

“To Knoxville. I’m gonna get a job on the railroad.
Then I can go all over this country—New York City, San
Francisco, Denver.”

“Why you wanna go to all them places?”

“So’s I can see things I never seen before.”

“Ain’t you skeered to go so far away all by
yerself?”

“Nah. Well, maybe a little. But sometimes they’s things you gotta do, no matter how skeered you are,” he said, fixing his gaze on her.

“Well, I think it’s crazy.”

“Sarey, you wouldn’t think it was crazy if you seen the pictures in them books. Do you know in Knoxville most folks don’t ride in wagons? They’s got automobiles! And in New York City they’s got buildings that are taller than twenty silos stacked on top of each other. They call ’em skyscrapers. Do you know why they’s called skyscrapers?”

“’Cause they touch the sky?”

“It sure looks like they do, but you’re right!”

“Miss Sarey Jane!” Mr. Taylor called out.

“I gotta go.”

“Why? Mr. Taylor don’t care if we talk.”

“My daddy’s probably out there waitin’ fer me.”

“See ya next week?”

“I don’t think so. You’re a liar and you’re crazy, Billy Puckett. You ain’t leavin’ Mary’s Cove and all them things you telled me about that ‘new’ city is jest fairy tales like my mama used to read me.”

“You’re wrong and I’ll prove it. Meet me out by your pa’s back pasture tonight at nine o’clock and I’ll show you pictures of all them things in my book.”

Sarey walked to the front of the store and saw her father waiting for her.

“What took ya?” he said, scowling.

“I was jest lookin’ at some of Mr. Taylor’s wares.”

“We best be goin.’ Your mama will be havin’ a fit if we don’t get back soon.

Sarey held the door open for him and he stumbled, almost dropping the groceries

“Go sit in the back of the wagon and hold onto the box so’s nothin’ gets broke.”

When they arrived home, Annabelle was in the kitchen setting the table.

“Well, you sure took your sweet time,” she snapped.

Tom laid the box of groceries on the table.

“Not there! I just wiped the oilcloth. We’s fixin’ to eat on that table, ye know,” Annabelle snarled.

He laid the box on the counter just hard enough to make the jars rattle.

After lunch, Annabelle said, “I still got this turrible headache. I’m gonna lay down.”

Sarey sat down and picked up her father’s newspaper. She could read the date—April 19, 1916—but that was about all. Sarey liked looking at the pictures, even if she couldn’t read the words. She noticed a picture of what she imagined a skyscraper would look like.

Her father looked up from his copy of *The Old Farmer’s Almanac*.

“Watcha doin’ with that newspaper? You cain’t read.”

“I know. I jest like lookin’ at the pictures. Here’s a picture of a skyscraper.”

“How you know about skyscrapers?”

Sarey froze.

“Uh...Mr. Taylor had a picture in a magazine of one and he tole me about ’em.”

“Well, be quiet for the rest of the afternoon. I’m goin’ to take a nap.

After supper Sarey washed and dried the dishes, then went into the living room where her mother was lying on the davenport.

“I’m gonna take my bath now, Mama.”

“Go right ahead. Tell your Pa to go heat the water up for you.”

Sarey went into her bedroom, picked out a clean nightgown and walked through the parlor. She undressed,

stepped into the tub and lowered herself into the water until just her head stuck out above the surface. She closed her eyes and let her mind wander.

Maybe Billy ain't lyin.' Maybe there's more to the world than the farm and Mary's Cove. Them skyscrapers in the newspaper sure looked mighty tall, jest like he said.

She lay there picturing the things Billy had told her about. She imagined herself riding in one of those automobiles sitting next to Billy. Sarey decided right then and there that she had to find out more. She *would* go and meet him tonight.

If Pa catches me, I'll get the whoopin' of my life. Maybe it's better not to know. Maybe I shouldn't go getting' crazy ideas like that. Gettin' "uppity," like Mama calls it. All them things—I'll never get to see 'em.

"Sarey Jane, hurry up and finish your bath,"
Annabelle called from the parlor.

Sarey stepped out of the tub, dried herself, put on her nightgown and walked into the parlor.

“I think I’m goin’ to bed. I’m feelin’ a bit poorly.”

“I’ll fix ya a nice cup of elderberry tea,” said Annabelle.

“If I get sick will you make me some, too?” Tom joked.

“Hush. Don’t be wishin’ bad things on yerself. You know it’s temptin’ the Devil.”

Sarey kissed her parents goodnight, walked into her room and crawled into bed. A few minutes later, her mother came in with the tea.

“Thank you, Mama.”

“Get to sleep soon as you finish your tea and don’t spill none of it..”

Sarey drank her tea as she summoned up the courage to do the unthinkable.

